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## THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION.

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Durham, England.

DR. J. G. FRAZER, in his new edition of the *Golden Bough*, has vastly added to the debt of obligation which all students of the science of religion already owed to him. Not only has he, out of his unparalleled stores of knowledge, doubled the size of his work, but he has also taken up a decided attitude, or perhaps rather has definitely made known his attitude, to the fundamental principles of the science of religion. Obviously, in any discussion, the first question we have to settle is what it is that we are discussing; ambiguity or misunderstanding on that point can only end in mutual dissatisfaction or mystification. The mere use of the same term for the subject of the discussion is fatal, if the two parties to the discussion use it in different senses, and neither is aware that the other means something different from what he does. If by one party a certain function of the mind is assumed to be a normal function of the mind, while by the other it is assumed to be abnormal, and neither is aware of the difference between them, confusion is bound to ensue. They are bound to look for different causes and to expect different results; and each, so far as he adheres consistently to his original assumption, will reach a different conclusion from the other, and marvel at the difference between them.

The first and fundamental principle is that we should know what we are talking about, whether it is a normal or an abnormal function, whether we are to class it among the truths or the illusions of human nature. On the answer to that question depends the whole of our subsequent treatment of the subject ; it determines the object and the goal which we shall be striving to reach, the direction in which we shall move, and the parallels which we shall adduce. If our subject is a mental illusion, then we must study it in the light of other acknowledged illusions and bring it under the laws which regulate them. But, having done so, we cannot expect our conclusions to be accepted by the man who, starting from the assumption that it is true, has been seeking to exhibit it in its development as a growing realization of truth. If, then, students of the science of religion are to pull together, they must begin by settling the direction in which they are going to pull. As long as they pull in opposite directions, the outsider may be excused for doubting whether there is any such science and what it is.

Now, these arguments assume that there is such a thing as metaphysics, and that the question whether there is any truth in religion is a metaphysical question. It is, indeed, a question which not everybody is bound to answer by metaphysics ; a man may answer it in the affirmative by faith, and may find faith the best way of getting other people to answer it in the affirmative. Nor, even if metaphysics be appealed to, is the answer sure to be in the affirmative; skepticism is a recurrent phase in the history of metaphysics. But if the question is to be argued, it is only on metaphysical grounds that it can be argued. When it is so argued, the history of metaphysics shows plainly enough that religious skepticism is but one form of general skepticism, is but one shape taken by the doubt whether truth of any kind whatever can be reached by man. If there are no sufficient grounds for believing that truth of any kind can ever be reached, and if faith be rejected as repugnant, then not only does religion go, but science also goes. The theories of science, then, as Dr. Frazer says at the end of the new edition of the *Golden Bough*, "are only parts of that unsubstantial world which thought has conjured up out of the void," and "the phantoms which the

subtle enchantress has evoked today she may ban tomorrow." And tomorrow's phantoms will be as false as those of today. If man can never reach the truth, if the truth is not in him, then the science of religion is as idle as religion itself is assumed to be by the skeptic. Now, practically speaking, we may say that no man who consistently held that truth was unattainable, even by science, would write or publish, as Dr. Frazer has done, a work of over a thousand closely printed pages on "the science of religion." The inference which the onlooker must draw is that the writer believed there was some truth in science, if there was none in religion. The amount of truth need not be supposed to be great. It is the principle alone for which we are concerned: some truth can be attained by man. Science, as Dr. Frazer says, "may hereafter be itself superseded by some more perfect hypothesis," but the use of the comparative "more perfect" obviously implies that Dr. Frazer thinks there is some truth in science. But when once we have admitted some truth into our scheme of things, there is no end to the prospect: "the advance of knowledge is an infinite progression toward a goal that forever recedes," Dr. Frazer says. The infinite alone is capable of holding all truth and all knowledge.

But when we have advanced so far in metaphysics as to contemplate the infinite as eventually the ultimate depository of all truth and all knowledge, and the goal toward which all knowing beings are progressing, we may perhaps begin to wonder whether Dr. Frazer is right in saying, "religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is displaced by science." The grain of truth, no larger than a mustard seed, has developed, even in Dr. Frazer's garden and under his cultivation, into the greatest of the trees of the earth, into the infinite. All that we want for the history or the science of religion is to know man's attitude of mind toward the infinite.

"The advance of knowledge" may then be admitted to be an infinite progress "toward a goal that forever recedes": the goal will never be reached by any finite, mortal being. Regarded as being in time, the goal must always be infinitely distant from any chosen instant in time. Regarded as eternity, it is ever present to the infinite. But if we admit that by the advance of knowledge we

mean progress toward a goal that yet never can be reached by finite beings, are we bound to admit that knowledge does advance and progress? The proposition is evidently hypothetical: if knowledge exists, and if it advances, then it advances toward a goal that ever recedes, *i. e.*, toward the infinite. Dr. Frazer has assumed that knowledge exists, that truth can (to some, however infinitesimal, extent) be attained; and he has made the assumption without producing any attempt to prove it, or to reconcile it with the skeptical attitude which he assumes even in the same paragraph. Indeed, it seems to us that he departs still farther from the skeptical position and assumes, again without proof or attempt at proof, and without recognizing his departure from skepticism, that knowledge does inevitably progress and necessarily advance in an infinite progression. The advantage of denying the existence and validity of metaphysics is precisely the fact that it enables you to make suppositions without proving them and without considering whether they clash with other suppositions you have made. It enables you first to take, as Dr. Frazer does, the attitude of philosophical skepticism; then to assume, in contradiction to skepticism, that truth exists and is to some extent attainable; and then that progress not only is sometimes made, but is necessarily, inevitably, and automatically made; in fine, that evolution is progress. According to Dr. Frazer, man has progressed and advanced from a period in which religion was unknown, and which he calls the period of magic, through the period of religion, into our present stage, in which religion has been exploded and science reigns instead.

The question, then, is whether progress is automatic and inevitable—whether, for instance, religion in some instances may evolve and yet not progress. If we accept the theory of evolution, and regard every event that takes place as a step forward in evolution, then the answer seems clear: the “progressive nations” have hitherto been in a minority, though all have been subject to the laws of evolution and have been evolving. The Australian black fellows have presumably been evolved as much as other people, but they have not progressed much; they are still, according to Dr. Frazer, in the pre-religious stage. The inequality of progress is as obvious to the

ethnologist as it is to the schoolmaster in charge of a form. Progress is neither automatic nor inevitable, as most of us can testify on the evidence of our own failures, moral and others. If we look at the question of progress from this, the individual, point of view, and consider our failures — they are more readily available than our successes — we can see that they imply something attempted and not done, something which arrested our attention and was subsequently dismissed, from which we turned aside before the actions necessary to attain it were set going. We dismissed it in the only way in which we can ever dismiss anything from attention — by attending to something else instead, by dwelling on the pleasures or advantages of doing what we ought not, and so dismissing from attention the thing that we ought and the fact that we ought. Now, to progress is a thing that we ought to do, and which, to use a *meiosis*, we have not always and invariably done. And the remark applies to any collection of individuals, a nation or mankind, as much as it does to any single individual: to progress may be a thing which all nations ought equally to do, but as a matter of fact they don't.

The moment, however, that we turn from the individual to the nation, this fact strikes us: what the individual discovers by concentration of attention he can communicate to others. They may accept what he has discovered, without themselves going through the process, as most of us accept the discoveries of science; or they may concentrate their own attention on the point and see for themselves. Of course, the average man never does concentrate his attention on nature to the same extent as the poet or the scientific genius. Hence Shakespeare and Newton remain not only above their predecessors, but above all subsequent generations of men also. The power of concentrating attention on the right facts, and of not letting it be drawn off to wrong ones, is the characteristic process of great minds. What is at such moments disclosed to them may be called a revelation, inspiration, or what you will; the result is a disclosure of what was not known before, and of what in the greatest examples remains thereafter, as a discovery, unrivaled. Why individuals, with such power, should appear in this place or at that time, what is the law of the distribution of genius, no writer has

attempted to explain; attention is a power of the will, and its exercise depends upon the individual. Its exercise to the extent in the cases alluded to is, by universal consent, exceptional and individual. It is so far as there is similarity among phenomena that general "laws" hold; it is when the individuality is so marked as to be obvious to all that no "law" will account for it. If then the distribution of genius has no law, it may be because the power of attention has none, but is strictly an individual affair in every case of its exercise.

Be this as it may, it is patent that progress is dependent upon the extent to which the members of the tribe, or the people, live up to the disclosures made to them by individual discoverers; and it is reasonable to hold that, where peoples are unprogressive, it is because no individual among them has made any such disclosures for them to live up to.

If we now consider that any science, the science of religion for instance, is concerned with the discovery and application of laws, it should be clear that there are restrictions within which the science moves. So far as there is similarity among the phenomena with which it deals, there may be laws. So far as the followers of a religion are similar, laws about them may be formulated. But the founder of a religion is admittedly individual in his thoughts and actions; it is because he is different, so widely different, from the ordinary run of men, that he has the capacity to make and to reveal the disclosures which are adopted by his followers. And it is because those disclosures are adopted and acted on by a multitude of men that any laws are discoverable in the actions of the multitude. If general laws are predicable about the followers of the religion, it is because ideas that in their origin were peculiar to the individual founder have been adopted by the multitude who have come to follow him. In fine, the science of religion may detect and formulate the laws according to which the followers act, and on which they react; but the founder, because of his individuality, falls under no law. In the same way, if there were a science of comparative literature, it might explain the effects produced upon the course and form of the drama by the appearance of Shakespeare; the genius of Shakespeare it would have to

take simply as given, as a *datum*. The materials he had to work upon might be traced, but not the source of his power. We can only say that the same world was presented to him as to his contemporaries, and that he chose the right things to attend to.

In this attempt to argue that progress is always due to some individual, we have naturally selected as illustrations men whose individuality is so marked that none can be compared with them. But we may descend from the great reformers to men of genius, and from them to men of talent, and from them again to men who have made but one slight invention or discovery—but have made it because they chose to attend to that particular class of facts—and we shall find in every case that each rivulet, rill, and drop which contributes to the stream of progress is individual; that in his, it may be, one discovery, the discoverer is individual and unique. As unique he comes under no law and cannot be brought into any generalization. So far as his discovery or views are adopted, he becomes the source of uniformities of action which may be formulated in more or less general terms and be taken into science. But his discovery was, at the first moment when he achieved it, his—his alone. Out of the infinite to him alone was it revealed—but not without effort on his part.

Generalization is possible only so far as the instances brought together under the general law are similar to one another. So far as any instance is unique, is really different from all other instances, is itself, it cannot be brought under any law. And it is just in this point, in the fact he discovers, or the invention which he makes, that the inventor does differ from all the world, and is individual. But it is precisely on these discoveries, inventions, inspirations, revelations—call them what you will—that progress depends. Where they are made, progress is made; and where they are wanting, progress is absent. It is just because these discoveries are unique and truly individual that they cannot be brought under a law, and that no law can be laid down to account for the appearance of the greatest men, when and where they did appear. No science of history can predict the appearance of genius, or shall say when the prophet shall come or what line he shall take. And what is conspicuously true, in this respect, of the greatest men is also true of those



minor furtherers of progress who make but one small discovery; small though it be, it is individual, unique; and, though it may become a law, it is subject to no law. The attention which we pay to any object presented to our notice we pay of our own choice and freely.

Progress, then, depends on the discoveries made by individuals, that is to say, on unique and individual acts of attention and exercise of will, and not upon general laws. The source of every rill which contributes to the stream of progress is unique. Evolution, then, may be universal, but progress is neither universal nor uniform, as the slightest acquaintance with the facts of history is sufficient to indicate. Still less are we in a position to affirm that progress must come, that it is necessary and inevitable. To be in such a position we should have to be able to demonstrate, not only that a great lawgiver will be hereafter forthcoming, but why he must. But science deals only with general laws, and with particular cases only so far as they are not individual, but have features in common with the other particulars grouped under the law. And every discoverer is in respect of his discovery unique, not under law, but the source of a law, or the channel through which a law becomes known. The individual, so far as he is individual, *i. e.*, different from all other individuals, cannot be predicted, is not the outcome of general causes. We are all individuals in this sense, that we have points of uniqueness, even though in other points we are all instances of general laws which can be predicated about us.

It is then for this reason that science cannot exhibit progress as necessary, inevitable, or automatic. The appearance or manifestation of individual genius is not the outcome of general causes, or the exemplification of a general law, for the simple reason that it is individual, *i. e.*, different from all other individuals, and, from its very definition, not a particular case of a general law, but something unique and unparalleled. Every one of the discoveries made by individuals is an irruption of the individual into the area with which science deals. With the effects of those irruptions science can deal, so far as they propagate themselves and become general, and therefore subject to general laws. But the irruption itself, the source of the uni-

formity in the actions of those who accept the discovery or revelation as the law to which they will conform, is individual in the strict sense; it is the outcome of the attention which the individual chose to pay to certain presentations rather than others.

There is, therefore, a certain discontinuity in science; and in the science of religion it manifests itself in such a way that it cannot be burked or long denied. That discontinuity lies in the sudden appearance of founders of religion. It is their individuality, in the strict sense of the word, carried to the highest pitch of uniqueness, which produces religions that, as practiced by their followers, remain for ever distinct from one another. When the beliefs, doctrines, revelations of the one discoverer become common to the many followers, they have the aspect of generality which science requires of its subject-matter. But the very possibility of science depends on the production of these widely extending undulations and consists in their generalization. It studies them, scientifically, when produced; but the study, however scientifically pursued, however thoroughly it may account for the undulations, for the ripples on the pool, will never explain why the stone which produced them was thrown into the pond. For the explanation of that we must go back to the will of him who threw it. And every act of will, though it has its general aspects, and in virtue of them may be classed with similar acts, has also its individuality, in virtue of which it is different from all other and from all similar acts. The amount of individuality, so to speak, may vary indefinitely; it may be so small that for certain purposes no great error arises, if it is classed along with other similar acts and its difference from them is overlooked; or it may be so great that it would be a serious error to class it along with other acts, which have indeed points of likeness with it, *e. g.*, in so much as they are acts of will and attention, but are also so different from it that they cannot be classed with it. It is in the rise and appearance of minds so utterly different from anything which preceded or followed them that is manifested the discontinuity of any historical science.

Progress, then, requires as its first condition the man of "originality," the man who for the first time in the history of

the human race sees, or chooses to attend to, some aspect of the infinite by which man is surrounded. But, though this is the first, it is not the only condition which must be realized, if progress is to be effected. Unless others, besides the discoverer or revealer of a new truth, choose to attend to it and make it their own, there can be no progress. But it is for them to attend to it or not; on them depends the choice. Whether progress shall be made or not depends for every man on his will; no man improves against his will. There is no fatalistic current of evolution carrying us on, like logs upon a stream, knowing nothing and doing nothing. We may hereafter do better or do worse than hitherto we have done; but in neither case is the issue independent of our will. And who can predict what his will shall be in the face of temptation, or what temptations he shall be subject to? He who can prophesy on this point may be able to prove that the course of the world will be one of continual progress. Failing the gift of prophecy, we may regard it as an open question. But two considerations should not be overlooked, one afforded by science and one by metaphysics. This earth must one day cease to be habitable for man; the cooling of the sun and the extinction of life upon the earth are among the prospects predicted by science. A continual progress, even if it were demonstrated to have taken place thus far, on the part of the human race, constitutes therefore no presumption that the process will be infinite; science testifies that the human race will cease to be. The waves of the sea may be lashed to great heights, but they fall again; the curve of human progress may be parabolic. The other consideration is that, even if the progress of the human race were to be conceived as infinite and infinitely great, no light is cast upon the progress of the individual; nor can the possibility of the continual progress of the individual be contemplated without the assumption of immortality—nor guaranteed with it. Progress depends on the will of the man who decides whether to do or not to do what he ought. So far as the will is free, neither optimistic nor pessimistic conclusions can be exhibited as necessary.

We may then now disengage from the above argument some

of the principles which seem fundamental for the science of religion.

The first is that the science of religion, like every other science, seeks to establish general laws, if not universal propositions. The uniformities which it seeks to detect are uniformities of action: that all men, or all men of a certain class, act, or tend to act, in a certain manner. In the case of any particular uniformity, the acts and the agents are many, but the principle is one.

But, in the next place, the many are a multiplication of the one; and, in the case of human actions, the many are imitations of the one. The importance of imitation in sociology is recognized and emphasized by writers like M. Tarde. Thus if, in the field of religion, we seek for the one which by imitation is multiplied into the many, we are led back at once, in the case of religions having a founder known to history, to some individual, who has become the founder of a religion and the source of those laws or uniformities which are studied by the science of religion, because his individual example has become the model for many to strive to follow. The science of religion, then, unlike some sciences, cannot rest content with the mere fact that certain things always occur or tend to occur, that bodies always do gravitate, or that moving bodies tend to move forever in the same straight line. It is not content with the mere fact that the many tend to behave in the manner noted to occur in certain cases; it is not content with a mere general proposition. It does not rest until it has found the one, the individual, whose life and teaching are multiplied by the imitation of the many into general laws. It is then a second fundamental principle of the science of religion not to rest content with its general laws, when it has discovered them, but to trace them back to the individual, to whom the facts in question were originally revealed and through whom they were made known, and became general laws.

In the course of history it happens that at the present moment the physical sciences occupy a dominant position in thought. They do not get farther than propositions to the effect that the many, *e. g.*, gravitating or moving bodies tend to behave

in certain uniform ways. The farthest point to which these sciences have been carried is naturally regarded, at the present moment, as the farthest point to which any science has been or can be carried. The logical consequence of making this assumption is to infer that sciences which, like the science of religion, do not eventuate in such propositions, are incomplete, imperfect sciences; and that they must be carried to the same point as the physical sciences before they can be recognized as real sciences. We must be content here to admit for the moment and parenthetically that the course followed by a historical science is the opposite to that followed by the physical sciences—that it seeks to find the explanation of the behavior of the many in the revelation or the actions of the one, whereas the physical sciences explain the particular case by reference to a general law—but we must also call attention to the fact that it is yet open to argument which of the two types of explanation is really final.

The science of religion, then, as a science is concerned with general laws of thought and behavior; and as a historical science is concerned with tracing these laws to their historical source, *i. e.*, with exhibiting the behavior of the many as imitations of the one, the individual who first manifested or revealed the thought which was to become a principle of action for the many. From this point of view it is evident that we cannot take it as a principle of the science of religion that religious progress is bound to take place in any nation or in any quarter of the globe. Progress is limited or conditioned by the individual, and that doubly. It depends partly on the will of the individual to imitate the highest model set before him, *i. e.*, the pattern given to him by the founder of the religion to which he belongs. Thus, progress depends partly on the extent to which the followers of a religion choose to live up to it. Partly also progress depends upon the occurrence of the founders of new and higher religions. Here, too, progress is entirely dependent on the will of the individual, and *ipso facto*, *i. e.*, in that it is dependent on individual will, is not the outcome of any general law. The new revelation, if and when it is made, is made because the individual

of his own free will chooses to attend to facts hitherto ignored, but now made patent to all.

This *a priori* argument to show that religious progress is not a thing automatically bound to take place, as a matter of necessity and as the outcome of general laws, is amply confirmed by the actual facts. Popular thought distinguishes between the progressive and the unprogressive peoples, and recognizes that the former are a minority, that progress is the exception and not the rule among the nations of the earth. Missionary societies, at any rate, are fully conscious of the fact that religious progress does not take place of itself, and that, if the great Exemplar is to be imitated by the heathen, his life must be made known to them. They are aware that there is no law that religious development is bound to take place whether we help or do not. Their position is that it depends to some extent on our wills, and on what we choose to do.

But when we have got to this point, when we have come to recognize that there is no inexorable force compelling us to progress, but that for each one of us progress depends upon his own will, we must also admit that deterioration is no impossibility. It is no impossibility for the individual, for a nation, or for all mankind. Every church has to contemplate the possibility and provide for the case of backsliding members. Every civilized society has at least its prisons. Even nations decay. These are tolerably obvious facts, but they have been somewhat shelved by the science of religion hitherto. It has been assumed, practically without question, that the most degraded tribes must be the most truly primitive, that the lowest point which mankind has reached must be man's earliest starting-point. Mr. Andrew Lang is almost the only writer who has consistently called attention to the fact that this is an assumption. It is a natural consequence of the idea that evolution is progress. Starting from that argument, we are bound to take the lowest of mankind as the earliest of men. If we discard that argument, if we accept the view that progress and deterioration depend in part upon the individual's will, we shall be prepared to consider the facts at any rate without prejudice. We shall recognize it as a scientific

possibility that an individual, a tribe, or a nation may not live up to its highest ideals, and may even abandon them altogether. To live up to them implies attending to them; and diversion of attention from them, if persisted in, amounts first to obliviscence, and perhaps eventually to oblivion. If we accept as the basis of a definition of religion what the work of Tiele, Max Müller, and Royce points to, viz., that it is concerned with man's conscious relation to the infinite, we shall be in a position to recognize that, at whatever point in the scale it may have started, it may subsequently have fluctuated indefinitely, sometimes above and elsewhere even below the original point. In individuals within the range of our own observation we may note both progress and regress; and what is observed fact in the individual can hardly be a thing impossible in the tribe or nation. The regress, indeed, may continue *ad infinitum*; but even so it can only attain to the infinitely little. Infinite divisibility still leaves a something divisible, however far it is carried, never an indivisible nought.

We are, therefore, bound on this showing to dismiss the idea that we must or can imagine a pre-religious stage in the history of man. In the earliest stages of his history as in the latest, man is in the presence of the infinite; and, as infinity has its center everywhere, is the center of the infinite. Man's conception of the infinite, everywhere inadequate, was at the least and lowest a conception of something greater and beyond himself. How much greater, how far beyond, was never defined; it was indefinitely, and therefore potentially, infinitely greater. It is so still.

It may perhaps be imagined that on *a priori* grounds we are compelled to assume that man's starting-point in religion must have been lower than any point now occupied by men. But on examination it will be seen that these *a priori* grounds are really nothing more than the untenable assumption that evolution is progress. On that assumption, indeed, it follows that, as all races of men have gone through a process of evolution, all must have made progress; and, therefore, that those which at the present day are lowest in religion must have progressed since their start-

ing-point. But this conclusion breaks down, if it is recognized that progress is not synonymous with evolution; that regress, as a matter of fact and observation, takes place as well as progress, and that both regress and progress are comprised within the process of evolution. If, then, the *a priori* argument breaks down, we have no ground for assuming that the lowest point now occupied in religious development is higher than that from which man originally started. Neither have we any *a priori* ground for assuming that it is not. Whether it is or is not, is a question which, so far as it can be decided at all, must be decided by facts. Thus, in examining the religious beliefs of the lowest races, we must approach the facts without prejudice. Those beliefs may represent a progress or a regress from a prior stage of belief. The idea that they *must* of necessity exhibit progress is just as unscientific as the idea that they *must* exhibit a decline from a primitive revelation. There is no *must* about it, except on the assumption that human actions are in no case a matter of human choice, but always of necessity. That assumption we set aside. We are consequently left to an impartial and unprejudiced consideration of the facts; the beliefs of the lowest races may be a progress or regress from prior beliefs, or simply a continuation of them. Is there anything in the facts to indicate the nature of the prior beliefs? Mr. Andrew Lang, in *The Making of Religion*, and *Magic and Religion*, has appealed to the facts simply, and produces them in evidence to show that in various low races there survives a belief in high gods. We use the word "survives" advisedly, because the beliefs have not been so prominent as to force themselves on the notice of all explorers or of all students. But of their existence it is impossible to doubt, since Mr. Lang has collected and published the evidence for it.

At the present moment, then, in the light of the facts before us, we are in a position to say that there is evidence to show that the tribes which occupy the lowest place in the religious scale have descended to that grade from a higher one. How they had reached that higher point, whether by descent or ascent, is beyond our knowledge. If by ascent—which there is nothing



to show—then, however low in the scale of infinite divisibility we place their starting-point, we can never reach a point from which the infinite was totally invisible to man.

It is the boast of science that it bases itself on facts. It is to facts that the science of religion must confine itself, if it is to be recognized as a science. And if it is to confine itself to facts, it must dissociate itself from the assumption that evolution is progress. It must recognize evolution wherever it occurs, even if the course of evolution has not been in the direction of progress. The cooling of the sun and the extinction of human life may be fatal to human progress and yet be part of the process of evolution. In the same way the evolution of religion may not always or in all places have been a process of progress; and where progress has conspicuously taken place, the science of religion, as a historical science, will find that it is initiated by the prophets of religion. Denunciation is part of the prophet's work. It is essential to reform. But reform is never simple return to the past. The past never returns. It is a new era which the prophet inaugurates. The initial impulse is given by him, but the subsequent direction is determined largely by those who come after. Both the impulse and the subsequent direction are, when they have occurred, matters of history and material for historical science. They are matters of history so far as they are unique, individual, and, in their essential features, unparalleled occurrences. They are material for science in so far as the impulse and direction are communicated to the many, and the particular differences between the individuals of whom the many is constituted are regarded as relatively unimportant. In every voluntary association of men—and at the beginning, at least, every church is essentially a voluntary association—a process of generalization takes place: principles are accepted as "binding," as common to all members. Men join of their own free will, recognizing the principles as their own principles. Thus, what was originally a revelation to an individual may become general to the members of a religious body, association, or church. And, having thus become general, it then becomes subject to general laws and matter for science. The doctrine

indeed, or the mode of life, becomes general property, as a musical composition may. But the mind through which the principle or the sonata was first disclosed remains unique and individual. The works of genius may be communicated ; the genius itself is incommunicable. It is a fact the occurrence of which may be recorded in history, and of which the general effects may be matter for the general laws of science. The science of religion is a historical science, because it is bound to take the individual, as and when he occurs, as a given fact. It is scientific because the effects produced by the individual are general.

Those effects are general in the sense that many individuals hold the doctrine, and that their differences with regard to it are either too small to attract anyone's attention, or are recognized as points on which difference of opinion is lawful — and negligible. The position of science with regard to individual facts which it generalizes and brings under some law is precisely the same attitude. Every fact, in that it is individual, is in some respect or other both distinguishable and distinct from every other similar fact. But for the purposes of science it is necessary to abstract attention from this indefeasible difference and concentrate attention on the likeness of this fact to others, which also have their own indefeasible individuality. When attention has been diverted from the points of difference to the points of likeness, facts individually distinct from one another may be brought under one generalization. But they can only be brought under it, in any abstract science, so far as their individuality and their individual differences are ignored. Every scientific abstraction, therefore, is subject to this deduction, viz., that it is not actually true of any individual fact : no body does forever move in the same straight line at a uniform rate, and nothing does ever fall to the earth at the rate of sixteen feet in the first second, etc. It is only by getting sufficiently away, by the process of scientific abstraction, from the actual facts, as they occur in individual cases, that you can cease to see the actual differences. It may be very desirable, for certain purposes, to pay no attention to the differences. It cannot further the attainment of truth to deny that the differences exist. Yet this denial is implicit in every attempt to

explain the universe as we know it from the abstract laws of matter and motion. The case is "like the flowing of a river: it is always different water, but you do not see the difference." If, in addition to not seeing it, you deny its existence, you are then in a position to explain what remains by abstract science. But what does remain to a world of individuals when you have denied the individuality of each and have asserted the non-existence of those very differences in which their individuality consists?

Obviously, what is left in the world, when the existence of the individual is ignored or denied, is the general. And what is left for the science of religion is the discovery of general laws. With the banishment of the individual from the world, history disappears. The science of religion, therefore, ceases to be a historical science. It is not concerned with individuals, any more than the science of mechanics is. In individual cases it can only recognize general laws at work, not unique, exceptional, and individual forces. Such forces cannot be recognized in a world in which only general causes are allowed to operate. From this point of view, you might as well maintain that the individual lightning-conductor originated the current which passes down it, as say that the individual mind ever originated or discovered anything. The fact is that the discoveries, changes, or reforms were bound to come; they were in the air, it was charged with them, and the fact that they happened to pass down this rod rather than that is no proof that the rod generates the lightning out of its own internal resources, or that it was essentially different in materials or construction from any other. If the lightning had not traveled down that conductor, it would have found another. If the plays of Shakespeare, or the music of Mozart, or the work of Newton, had not come through those particular minds, they would have come through somebody else's; they were in the air—those particular minds did not generate them. There could have been nothing individual about those minds, because nothing is individual; for abstract science the general alone exists.

If this line of argument does not seem satisfactory, and yet we do not like to give up the position that science alone gives us

the truth, we have an alternative course open to us. We may imagine the world's population, at any time, arranged in order of mental ability, either in a line starting from idiocy and terminating in genius; or on the principle that "thin partitions" divide genius from madness, in a circle, if you like. And we may imagine that the scale is the same from generation to generation, but that circumstances touch now this key, now that. Thus the reason why a Dante is heard at one place and time, and not at another, is not that he was individual and unique; on the contrary, there are potential Dantes in every generation; but that circumstances touched that particular key on that particular occasion. Or, if you like, an infinite number of "sports" are put forth in every generation, over and over again; but only that "sport" which circumstances favor develops into a "variety" and so into a species. Why circumstances should favor this "sport," touch this key, rather than that, we do not know and cannot tell. We only know, on this theory, two things, one positive—the fact that the key is touched—and one negative—that the key has no free will in the matter and does not press itself down. We have got a mechanical theory, and we have got it by denying all initiative to the individual; and we have been led to deny such initiative because we began by denying the existence of the individual, in deference to an abstract science which only admits the existence of general laws and general truths.

Now, the essence of the theory which has just been stated is that the keyboard is the same from generation to generation, and that the circumstances change, striking now this key, now another. If the same key is never struck twice, if we do not have a Goethe every generation, that is not because the key is not there all the time, but because circumstances do not happen to touch it and call its note forth. If the circumstances had been the same, the result would have been the same. But the result was not, therefore the circumstances were not. The keyboard is infinite and the circumstances infinitely various.

That is all we want. We have come around to an infinite variety of notes all individually distinct, and all operated on by circumstances which are never identically the same in any two

cases. The world is a world of individuals, and general laws are got only by ignoring or denying the individuality of the particulars from which they are drawn.

The science of religion, then, is a historical science. To abandon "historical" is to postulate in the science of religion the same uniformity as we find in mechanical science. But the moment we postulate this uniformity, we are confronted with the variety in the facts; and, to account for that variety, we ascribe it to circumstances, and are then bound to assume them to be different in every case. Thus we preserve the mechanical conception of cause and effect, but we lose the uniformity; no cause ever identically recurs, because the effects, we see, are different. However similar two cases of the action of the "same" cause may be, they differ at least in this, that they happen at different moments of time and therefore in a different context. They may be performed with different materials; you can't fire the same cartridge twice. Two freshly minted coins are not the same coin, however similar. But to admit these facts is to recognize that no two individual cases are the same. And that takes the sting out of the law of causation; its uniformity is not absolute, its denial of individuality is not complete. Its compulsory force disappears; we need not fear the threat that in the same circumstances we must do the same thing, if the circumstances never are the same in any two cases—and they never are. The fact that the individual is individual and unique, himself and all his actions, is the charter of his freedom. It is also the reason why no two religions ever follow the same line of evolution: the individuals who founded them are not the same, neither are the individuals who follow them. The science which studies them must, if it is to trace their evolution, be historical. Indeed, apart from all theory as to the reason why, the fact that every religion follows its own line is manifest. At the same time, it is also evident that there are resemblances between the individuals who practice different religions, and also between the different religions which are practiced. And it is in virtue of these resemblances that the study of religions must, if properly pursued, be a science.

Among the resemblances, then, there must be something of fundamental importance. But so, too, must there be among the differences. For certain purposes it is proper, indeed necessary, to insist upon the resemblances. But to go farther and say that the resemblance is the only thing of fundamental importance is a mistake fertile in fallacies for the science of religion, but frequently committed. Thus, it necessarily requires us to set the most rudimentary form of religion by the side of the most developed, and to declare that the points in which they are similar are the essence of religion. If this is a correct mode of argument, it follows that essentially there is no difference between the religion of the lowest and most degraded savages and that of the highest and most developed minds. The latter may have been evolved from the former, but there can have been no progress in religion, if in its most evolved form religion is not essentially different from what it was in its lowest stage. This line of argument naturally lends itself to those who regard religion as a form of fallacy into which the race of man might naturally fall in its helpless infancy, and from which man will deliver himself, when he discovers that in the most evolved forms of religion there is really nothing more than a fallacy into which the savage in his ignorance naturally fell. This seems to us to be the argument implicit in the *Golden Bough*. It seems also, to us, to be the logical consequence of the erroneous assumption that the only essential feature in religion is that which is common to the lowest and to the highest forms of religion. This assumption, as we have endeavored to show, is characteristic of the view that the science of religion is not a historical science, does not deal with individuals and their fundamental differences from one another, but with their resemblances, and the generalizations built upon those resemblances, alone.

It is possible, indeed, to go to the other extreme, to ignore or deny the resemblances altogether. This is the line adopted by those for whom there is only one true religion; all other forms are false religions, are not religion at all; there is no real resemblance whatever between their religion, the true one, and others falsely so called. From this point of view there may be a

history of religions; there can be no science, because there is no real resemblance.

This line of argument has at least one good result: it brings out the fact that the term "religion" is an ambiguous term. It makes it evident that no science of religion—historical or not—can begin without a definition of religion. The first and fundamental principle, as we said at the beginning of this article, is that we should know what we are talking about. The two extreme arguments, or assertions, are, on the one hand, that all religions but one are essentially false; on the other, that all religions without exception are false. We have pointed out that the latter view is but the application to religion of a philosophical skepticism which holds that the truth—if there be such a thing as truth—is never in any direction or in any matter whatever attainable by man. It is a view which is fatal, not merely to the science of religion, but to all science of whatever kind. As put forward by Dr. Frazer in the *Golden Bough*, it seems to be an exaggeration and misinterpretation of an undoubted fact. According to Dr. Frazer, "the advance of knowledge is an infinite progression toward a goal that forever recedes." Our knowledge, therefore, is at all times infinitesimally small. If Dr. Frazer limited himself to that statement, his position would be unassailable. But he seems to us to glide unconsciously, not merely from the infinitesimally small to the infinitesimally smaller, but to the absolute nought of metaphysical skepticism. Now, this is inconsistent with his assumption that man has some knowledge, and that that knowledge increases. That knowledge, however much it increases, will still be infinitesimally small compared with the infinite; but, so far as it goes, so far as it is really knowledge, it is fatal to skepticism. It admits that man is in relation to the infinite, that he has some knowledge of the infinite, and that that knowledge may increase.

The other extreme position—that all religions but my religion are essentially false—is tenable only if we close our eyes to the resemblance between religions. It amounts to maintaining that nothing which is general to all religions, or common to any two, can be true; or that nothing which is common to two

or more "so-called" religions can be religious in the true sense of the term. The assertion is patently false, but it demonstrates the necessity of defining our terms.

As we have said, the definition must be not merely wide enough to include all the resemblances between the different forms of religion; it must be broad enough to embrace all the differences which the different forms, so far as they are really religions, display. It must find room, not merely for my form of religion, so far as it is true for me, but for the religions of others, so far as they are true for them. Indeed, it must go farther, and must recognize the possibility of advance from truth to truth—and also the possibility of relapse. The religious attitude must be one which it is possible for man freely to grow into, and freely to grow out of. We cannot, therefore, define it merely as man's relation to the infinite, for, though man may dismiss that relation from his attention, it still exists, even if in a different form. The fact that man is in some relation to the infinite by which he is surrounded is not one which is dependent on his will or on his awareness of the fact, whereas the religious relation is in part dependent on man's will; it is voluntary, it is an attitude which man can take up if he will. It is a conscious relation and a voluntary attitude toward the infinite, conceived as a person. Any and every conception of the infinite is, *ex vi termini*, inadequate; but one thing essential is that the conception should be of something above and beyond the worshiper. The attitude, therefore, must be not merely conscious and voluntary, it must also be emotional, from the necessities of the case; and it must involve emotions such as naturally accompany the consciousness of the presence of what is beyond and above the worshiper. But the emotions evoked by the presence of a superior power depend upon the position which the person appearing in the presence imagines himself to occupy; they may be dread, hatred, terror, or what not. Such emotions are or may be natural in a man who is dragged or forced into the presence; less so in a man whose will and movements are free, who enters not the presence unless he chooses so to do. The fact, therefore, that the religious relation is one which is voluntarily



assumed, though it does not exclude fear—the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—does imply the beginning of confidence and trust which, as they develop, cast out fear. The communion which thus exists between the worshiper and his God is not, indeed, thus established or begun. Man is from the beginning part of the infinite. To say, as Professor Tiele does, that “man has the infinite within him,” is to cast unnecessary difficulties in the way of recognizing the fact. He is, from the beginning, part of the infinite and is in relation to it. He is in some sense, from the beginning, in communion with it, and conscious of it. But the development of that conscious communion is at all times a matter for his will. It may be reduced to the infinitesimally small, but never to absolute zero. It may be raised, but not without man’s will.

It is the recognition of the part played by man’s will which compels us to recognize the science of religion as a historical science, as one which is concerned with what, as a matter of fact, have been the expressions of that will, and not the outcome of any “necessity.” A recognition of this fact debars us from asserting or believing that there is any predetermined course of evolution in religion through which all men must pass. A historical science must take the facts as it finds them, as they are given. There is no compulsion on man to pass from the stage in which he is to any further stage. Still less is there any “necessity” driving all men on through exactly the same passing-points. The actual facts which the science of religion has to contemplate are plain and incontrovertible evidence on the point. The Australian black man simply has not made progress in religion to the same extent as other peoples. The course of religious progress has not been the same in China and Peru. If the history of every nation has been peculiar to itself, so has the history of every religious community. And the differences are due in part to the fact that the history in each case is made by the action and will of individuals who are essentially distinct from one another because they are individual. The difference between individual and individual, though fundamental and essential, as is the fact that two coins, fresh from the same mint,

are not the same coin, however great their similarity, is yet compatible with likeness. The likeness may be great or it may be extremely small; and, where it is originally but small, it may be increased, if one individual imitates the other. This power of imitation, however, itself tends to increase the differences between one community and another. People imitate those with whom they come in contact; and a marked individuality is, or may be, imitated by those within his sphere of influence. He is not imitated by those who know not of him. A language is learned by imitation, and is common to those who come in contact with one another. One condition, and an indispensable condition, of the differences between the Indo-European languages was the separation of the peoples who were to develop the separate languages. Thus differences, which in their origin were the work of individuals, developed by imitation into dialects, and from dialects into languages. They became dialects and languages because they were imitated and adopted by the community.

It is with religion as it is with language. All men have religion as all men have speech. The religion, like the speech, of one community is not that of another community. The differences between the various forms of religion, like the differences between the various dialects of one speech, go back for their source to the individual or individuals in whom they first manifested themselves. They were perpetuated by the many's imitation of the one; and they were perpetuated each in one community alone, because the various communities were isolated from one another. Yet the differences in language simply veil the meaning that lies behind them and is expressed through them. To say that no meaning lies behind the different forms of religion, or is expressed through them, is to disqualify oneself as an interpreter and to deny the possibility of a science of religion.